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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Involvement of the United Nations system in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "The involvement of the United Nations system in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance" (A/50/687).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

I. GENERAL

1. In welcoming the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) notes that some of the actions provided for in the report's recommendations have already been taken or are ongoing, such as the release of, and inter-agency follow-up to the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, and the ongoing work to follow up, at the inter-agency level, Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 of 28 July 1995. Indeed, many of the issues raised in the report are already being addressed on an ongoing basis at the inter-agency level as part of a systematic effort to improve the efficiency and impact of the humanitarian community's response to emergencies. From this viewpoint, the cost-effectiveness of the exercise would have been enhanced if the extensive interactions that have taken place between JIU and the concerned agencies in the context of the preparation of the report had found a better reflection in the final version of the JIU report. The report also does not take fully into account the fact that the membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is wider than the United Nations system.

2. Another factor limiting the effectiveness of the report is that the Inspector did not observe concrete instances of coordination in the field. The understanding of the intricacies of coordination in a complex emergency setting reflected in the report is therefore somewhat theoretical.

3. Individual recommendations in the report have been reviewed within the framework of IASC. The Standing Committee's comments on these recommendations, as endorsed by ACC, are reproduced below.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

4. IASC notes that General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, by which the Assembly established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and IASC, constitutes the general policy framework for the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Since its establishment in 1992, IASC has been involved, on a continuing basis, in the elaboration of system-wide policies for humanitarian assistance response and, especially in refining coordination arrangements in the field, e.g., through agreed terms of reference for humanitarian coordinators. IASC believes that both the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) (pre-crisis) and the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) (during the crisis) are intended to ensure integrated and coordinated inter-agency response to emergencies. IASC also considers that, because of the very nature of complex emergencies, an effective and coordinated response requires a high degree of flexibility on behalf of all concerned. This entails practical agreements between agencies - such as those formalized in the memoranda of understanding

between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and both the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund - and the search for complementarities that may evolve over time. IASC therefore sees little to be gained in negotiating a "global policy agreement".

Recommendation 2

5. IASC concurs with the emphasis on indigenous coping mechanisms contained in this recommendation. IASC is currently addressing this issue as part of its response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 through a specific and time-limited working group. IASC notes that existing structures are already used as much as possible. IASC believes that, where national and local structures have been destroyed or damaged, relief agencies should make every effort to assist in their rapid recovery and promote the timely transfer of relief operations from international relief agencies and non-governmental organizations. Finally, IASC recognizes that educational, health and agricultural inputs are critical to the long-term survival and recovery of affected communities during emergencies.

Recommendation 3

6. IASC has recently agreed to an inter-agency arrangement for the use of military and civil defence assets, including the establishment of a Military and Civil Defence Unit located within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

Recommendation 4

7. IASC recognizes the usefulness of enhancing complementarity and lateral cooperation with the bodies mentioned on matters of mutual interest. It is of the view that this can best be achieved through ad hoc arrangements or consultations between the secretariats of the bodies concerned, as is the case with the current discussion on post-conflict reconstruction. IASC does not believe that there is a need for an institutionalized approach. In any case, matters of interest to the various bodies cited in this recommendation are often brought to the attention of IASC. IASC welcomes the increased cooperation between the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in early warning and its potential for improving decision-making processes within the United Nations.

Recommendation 5

8. IASC is in general agreement with this recommendation. The tasks listed are under constant review by IASC. In certain cases, e.g., logistic coordination arrangements, country-specific agreements have been worked out. Issues relating to the division of labour in relief and rehabilitation are currently being addressed by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and the IASC task force on the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56. With respect to subparagraph (e), IASC fully supports learning lessons from past experience. A working group has been set up to review how system-wide reviews could be carried out under the aegis of IASC. At the same time, individual agencies continue to draw lessons in their specialized areas of competence.

Recommendation 6

9. IASC is well aware of the concerns addressed in this recommendation. With respect to subparagraph (c), in which it is suggested that ground-level decisions should receive limited second guessing by Headquarters, IASC agrees that authority should be delegated with a minimum of bureaucratic layers. This will, however, depend very much on procedures within each agency. On policy issues, interaction with Headquarters is obviously required. IASC notes that Humanitarian Coordinators are responsible for overall coordination functions, not for the management of specific sectoral responses, which are the responsibilities of relevant operational agencies.

Recommendation 7

10. IASC considers that the Consolidated Appeal Process is a key instrument for mobilizing donor support to complex emergencies based on inter-agency assessments of humanitarian requirements. Members of IASC have participated in CAP and in ongoing efforts to improve CAP. IASC therefore does not understand, or agree with, the observations on the conditionality proposed for the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). IASC remains convinced that relief assessments should focus on actual humanitarian requirements. Development requirements should be addressed by other mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Round Table or the Consultative Group of the World Bank. Mechanisms for the mobilization of resources for relief, rehabilitation and development and their linkages are currently under review by IASC and ACC. It is recognized, however, that for practical purposes, CAPs may include immediate rehabilitation needs and that it is necessary for the United Nations system as a whole to devise means to strengthen the complementarities between CAP, Round Table and Consultative Group mechanisms.

Recommendation 8

11. IASC, through its working group and country-specific task forces, routinely monitors the status and progress of humanitarian assistance operations under way. Meetings with relevant local authorities to discuss and consider priority issues for relief assistance are held on a regular basis, through the normal coordination arrangements, in each of the countries where emergency operations take place.

Recommendation 9

12. IASC notes that most of the suggestions listed have either already been implemented or are under constant review by most of the operational agencies.

Recommendation 10

13. IASC notes that its members routinely cooperate with and provide information to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/HEWS for early warning. Cooperation and consultation between agencies with regard to the analysis and exchange of information during crises is already occurring; for example, the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) and ReliefWeb ensure that information is collected, analysed and shared in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 11

14. IASC agrees with the thrust of this recommendation.

Recommendation 12

15. IASC agrees with this recommendation since such additional resources would facilitate the timely response to immediate rehabilitation and transition requirements. IASC notes that CERF is already open to contributions from private and non-governmental organization donors.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and proclamation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 50/107 of 20 December 1995, the General Assembly took note of the Secretary-General's proposal that the theme of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996) be "Poverty can be and must be eradicated throughout the world" (see A/50/551). Noting also the activities planned for the Year by the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, the Assembly decided that the aim of the activities during the Year should be to support a longer-term, sustained effort to implement fully and effectively the commitments, recommendations and measures undertaken, and the basic provisions already agreed upon at major United Nations conferences since 1990, in particular the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly proclaimed the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), originally proposed at the World Summit for Social Development. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-first session, in one document, a progress report on action taken by the United Nations system to implement the programme for the observance of the Year and action to be taken in preparation for the Decade. Subsequently, at its special session of 1996, the Commission for Social Development, in its resolution S-1996/1, on strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General, in elaborating the report on action to be taken by the United Nations system in preparation for the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, to propose specific activities for each year of the Decade in order to facilitate the follow-up to and evaluation of such activities.

3. The present report was prepared in response to those requests. Section II consists of a brief summary of action taken by the United Nations system in observance of the Year. Section III provides a description of initiatives taken in and by the United Nations system to lay down the foundations of a long-term programme of support for the goals and objectives of the Decade. This is followed by a number of suggestions for the consideration of the General Assembly concerning action in support of the Decade. The present report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development (A/51/348).

II. THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

A. Framework for national action and international support

4. At the conclusion of the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, Governments adopted the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Among the ground-breaking agreements made by the world's leaders, among them 117 heads of State or Government, was the commitment to eradicate absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country. The relevant commitment, commitment 2, reads, as adopted: We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in

the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.

5. The Programme of Action adopted at Copenhagen is detailed and comprehensive. It specially underlined two aspects. First, given the different circumstances faced by each country, it is important to develop national strategies; these strategies will provide the reference point for international support. At the same time, in many developing countries, the formulation of coherent and implementable national strategies is contingent on adequate international support, technical and financial. Second, the Programme of Action incorporates time-bound, specific targets, mostly already agreed in international forums, pertaining particularly to fulfilling the basic needs and the provision of basic social services for all.

6. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action provide the substantive framework for the activities in observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and for planning the effort of the United Nations system in support of the first Decade and beyond.

B. Activities of the United Nations system

7. The challenge of responding to the demands of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty is two-fold. First is the challenge for each United Nations entity of re-examining its activities and programmes from the viewpoint of the commitments and Programme of Action of Copenhagen and of other major United Nations conferences as they relate to poverty. The second challenge lies in the elaboration of a coherent, coordinated set of actions by the United Nations system as a whole, and the effective integration of the individual contributions from the different entities of the system.

8. Up-to-date information regarding both these challenges is contained in several recent reports, notably the report of the Secretary-General on the coordination of the activities of the United Nations system for the eradication of poverty (E/1996/61) submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1996 and the background information note on the United Nations system poverty eradication activities and their coordination (E/1996/CRP.2). The salient points may be summarized in the following terms:

9. The United Nations system assists countries, where requested, in the formulation of national plans and programmes for the eradication of poverty in line with Government priorities and with the commitment to an integrated and coordinated follow-up to recent conferences. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting national efforts to strengthen or rebuild capacities for formulating, coordinating, implementing and monitoring integrated poverty strategies, and supporting efforts to empower people living in poverty and their organizations, involving them fully in poverty assessments and the formulation and implementation of poverty strategies.

10. Support for poverty eradication initiatives at the country level is coordinated through the resident coordinator system. In response to national poverty plans and priorities for the International Year for the Eradication of

Poverty, United Nations funds, programmes and organizations represented at the field level continue to expand and improve coordination and promote joint activities related to the design, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities related to the eradication of poverty.

11. The mandates of the United Nations organizations and the goals and objectives of the global conferences in the area of poverty eradication are translated into specific activities at the country level. The activities may be grouped into three main categories, namely, (a) policy advice in a broad sense; (b) enhancement of information on poverty; and (c) support for basic social services and other concrete initiatives that directly benefit the poor.

1. Policy advice

12. Policy advice has been a growing focus of the activities of United Nations organizations geared to poverty eradication. A number of diverse activities may be grouped under this category:

(a) Analytical work focusing on the problem of definition and determination of poverty, the methodology for the assessment of poverty and the development of indicators; analytical work focusing on the impact on poverty of the international economic environment and of economic policies; and research on the most successful strategies, policies and activities to eradicate poverty. Organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, the United Nations University (UNU), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the regional commissions are involved in this type of activity.

(b) Assistance and policy advice to render Government action for poverty eradication more effective and to ensure that macro-level and sectoral policies have a positive impact on social development and poverty eradication. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations system emphasizes meso-level policies related in particular to the allocation of public expenditures. Policy advice also focuses on removing distortions and regulations that disadvantage the poor and limit their income-generating opportunities. United Nations organizations that provide this type of policy advice are UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and IMF.

(c) More emphasis is being given to the full participation of the poor in the programmes and projects of several United Nations agencies so as to increase the sustainability of poverty eradication programmes. New partnerships are being developed by United Nations organizations such as UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, FAO and IFAD with Governments and civil society, including local authorities, community institutions and non-governmental organizations.

2. Enhancement of information on poverty

13. A number of agencies are involved in either measuring or reporting on poverty, and a few are directly involved in poverty-related data collection. Poverty analysis is often limited by the availability of accurate data. Household surveys and similar types of statistical exercises are often not available in many developing countries. UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, ILO, IFAD, the regional commissions and the Statistical Division of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis of the Secretariat have accumulated extensive experience in providing assistance to the developing countries in this area.

14. At the inter-agency level, measurement of poverty is undertaken by a task force of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Inter-agency cooperation has often been possible within initiatives focusing on the social dimensions of adjustment, traditionally starting with the collection of quantitative information on poverty phenomena and their dynamic evolution.

3. Provision of basic social services and other initiatives that directly benefit the poor

15. The provision of means and services that are required to improve the living conditions of the poor is a responsibility that is shared by a great variety of actors, particularly at the national level. At the international level, several United Nations organizations have accumulated significant experience in the provision of direct benefits for the poor. Activities can be classified into five sub-groups:

Basic social services

(a) Many organizations of the United Nations system, including UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP, UNESCO, the World Bank and IMF, support the delivery of basic social services and activities to develop or strengthen the access of the poor to basic services and assist in developing national capacities in these areas. Basic social services, as defined in the Copenhagen Programme of Action, include basic education, primary health care and family planning services, low-cost safe water and sanitation, and nutrition programmes.

Safety nets

(b) Several United Nations organizations, such as UNDP, WFP, ILO, the World Bank and IMF, support social safety nets and social funds or provide technical assistance to establish various forms of safety nets and social funds to protect vulnerable groups.

Income-generating activities

(c) Many initiatives that are classified as income-generating activities, and seek to increase the incomes of the poor through employment creation and productivity-enhancing measures, represent examples of ways of providing skills and resources that the poor need to improve their conditions. These initiatives

may aim at different types of outcome: access to credit, rural extension services, training, access to technologies, etc., and focus on sectors in which the poor are largely concentrated. They include actions in favour of micro, small and medium-sized scale enterprises (e.g., initiatives promoted by UNDP, ILO, IFAD, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)), of smallholders and landless rural workers (IFAD), self-employment (ILO), non-formal or unorganized sectors (ILO, Habitat), rural industrial development (UNIDO), rural development (FAO, IFAD), non-farm rural workers and pastoralists (FAO), and cooperatives and local associations (UNDP and others).

Public works

(d) Labour-intensive public works are also of direct benefit to the poor in two ways: through income-generating employment on public works, especially by labour-intensive methods, and through the improvements in the infrastructures.

Gender perspective

(e) Mainstreaming the gender perspective in United Nations activities is of paramount importance for poverty eradication. The high incidence of poverty among women has been a focus of many interventions by organizations of the United Nations system, including activities targeted at women who are heads of households (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, etc.), smallholders, poor farmers, landless, and marginal farmers (FAO, IFAD), refugees or internally displaced persons, victims of natural disasters (WFP, IFAD), and rural women in general (FAO).

16. Poverty is a core issue for the three inter-agency task forces established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in October 1995 to follow-up cross-cutting themes of recent global conferences. The task force on the enabling environment for social and economic development (World Bank as lead agency) is to address, among other issues, integrated country strategies for poverty eradication. The task force on basic social services for all (UNFPA as lead agency) and the task force on employment and sustainable livelihoods (ILO as lead agency) address objectives central to any overall anti-poverty strategy. The work of these task forces over the past few months is described in the report of the Secretary-General on coordination of the activities of the United Nations system for the eradication of poverty (E/1996/61).

17. The Consultative Committee for Programme and Operational Questions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination ensures a continuing dialogue within the system on strategies and issues related to development activities and for the implementation of intergovernmental mandates. It serves not only as a forum for information exchange, but also to promote harmonization of programme and project cycles and activities at the field level.

18. In April 1995, the work of the Consultative Committee's Working Group on Poverty resulted in the production of a report on the work of the United Nations system in poverty alleviation, which was distributed to all resident coordinators and field representatives. It was to be used for assessing the potential for United Nations coordination at the country level.

19. The Consultative Committee for Programme and Operational Questions held a workshop on poverty in February 1996 which was attended by representatives of seven United Nations organizations and programmes (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Volunteers programme, ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and IFAD) as well as governmental, non-governmental and research organizations. The workshop was held to galvanize the United Nations system's thinking on how best to adapt to new global and national poverty agendas and evolving strategies for poverty eradication, and generate ideas for programmatic and operational inter-agency collaboration in the area. The Consultative Committee called the task forces' attention to a number of issues emerging from its report. Those relating to the proposals of the workshop for country-level joint action include the establishment of a working definition of poverty at the country level (on conceptual and measurement issues); a recommendation on trying to "learn from best practices"; and the recommendation that joint impact-assessment and monitoring of poverty eradication programmes be developed (including harmonized United Nations system procedures). In addition, discussions in the Committee highlighted the fact that, because of its multisectoral dimensions, the goal of poverty eradication required operationalization through translation into specific objectives and time-bound targets.

20. The Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development of the Administrative Committee on Coordination is also strengthening its role in addressing the follow-up to international conferences held after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. With a view to promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development, it is liaising closely with the Consultative Committee for Programme and Operational Questions, other existing coordination mechanisms that focus on poverty eradication and sustainable development, and the three task forces on follow-up to conferences.

21. The Inter-agency Committee on Women, established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its first session of 1996, is responsible for addressing on a comprehensive system-wide basis all aspects of the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in particular those related to poverty. It also reviews the implementation of gender-related recommendations emanating from other recent international conferences within the purview of the system.

III. FIRST UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

A. Laying the foundations for the effort of the United Nations system

22. Various activities and actions, undertaken in 1996, helped to lay the foundations for a United Nations system-wide, long-term, sustained effort in support of the objective of eradicating poverty.

1. Commission for Social Development

23. The Commission for Social Development was requested by the Economic and Social Council to consider the priority topic "Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty" during its special session of 1996.

24. Commission resolution S-1996/1 relating to the eradication of poverty was brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council during its substantive session of 1996. The General Assembly may wish to refer to the resolution when considering the question.

25. The Commission also held a series of panel discussions on the eradication of poverty in which experts from government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the academic community participated, to consider the following themes: (a) formulation of integrated strategies; (b) meeting the basic human needs of all; and (c) promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives.

26. Major points and innovative ideas emanating from the panel discussions in response to issues raised by delegations and discussed by participants and panellists complement and supplement the Copenhagen Programme of Action relating to poverty.

27. The following points may be of special interest to policy makers:

(a) An enabling international environment

28. Rapid globalization of the world economy and liberalized trade affect the abilities of Governments to design and implement strategies for development and poverty eradication. Globalization may increase the vulnerability of people, as many people are incapable of adjusting quickly to new and changing conditions. To ensure that the opening of national economies does not lead to greater inequality, it is essential that Governments guarantee the rights of all sectors of society and promote equal access to resources.

29. In many countries, increased resources are necessary for full and effective implementation of strategies to eradicate poverty. Additional financial resources are called for, whether obtained through established means including increased and dependable official development assistance, better mobilization of domestic resources and greater direct foreign investment, or through innovative means. Resources in kind are also important; these are the non-financial contributions of communities to their own development. Particularly where financial resources are scarce, they are essential to poverty eradication.

(b) The relationship between economic growth and social development

30. Economic growth is essential for social development, particularly to ensure provision of basic social services. Yet even when economic growth is strong, social development does not follow automatically. Experience in countries that have made advances in reducing poverty indicates that strong and sustained political commitment to policies which pay attention to the distribution of income and to investment in human resources through basic social services,

combined with effective service delivery mechanisms and mobilization of all the actors involved, is fundamental to the eradication of poverty. Policies should also encourage growth which is labour-intensive and job-creating.

(c) Promoting productive employment

31. Policies and programmes should enable workers, particularly those in the informal sector, to become more efficient, thus raising their productivity and incomes. Education and training to impart practical skills and knowledge, regularly revised to take into account changing labour markets and national development needs, are essential and should be a prime concern. Governments can encourage the development of the informal sector through improving access to credit and adopting measures to raise productivity, leading to increased incomes and greater stability and protection for workers. In rural areas emphasis should be given to the non-farm sector as a means to absorb surplus labour.

(d) Meeting basic human needs and providing basic social services

32. Basic social services include basic education, primary health care, nutrition, family planning and low-cost access to clean water and sanitation. The provision of basic social services can be effective in reducing poverty and is fundamental to the satisfaction of basic human needs. It can be complicated, however, particularly in isolated areas, and requires dedicated and long-term commitment from Governments and non-governmental organizations to identify and reach the people most in need and to overcome the tendency for programmes to be usurped by those with more power, connections or information. In many places it also requires non-formal means, including communities and families, who can provide resources, labour, management skills, time and enthusiasm.

33. Greater assurance of financing for basic social services is needed. Sources of increased resources include increased Government allocations, greater mobilization of community resources, debt relief or debt swaps, additional bilateral and multilateral aid, foreign borrowing, private investment and privatization of services, special taxes and greater use of cost-recovery.

34. The Oslo Consensus on 20/20, reached at a meeting held in that city from 23 to 25 April 1996, calls on developing countries to initiate dialogues with their development partners with a view to identifying methods to expand and fund access to basic social services. In the future, consultative group and round-table meetings will include a session on the implementation of 20/20 and the financing of basic social services. Recently, at the high-level meeting of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, a series of time-bound commitments was approved aiming to reduce poverty and meet targets for the provision of basic social services.

(e) Perceptions of the poor

35. Policies to eradicate poverty must consider various aspects of the problem, and must recognize and overcome stereotypes and prejudices which often accompany public discussion of the issue. They must consider the perception that people living in poverty have of themselves. The media are important in creating and maintaining images of the poor and the causes of their condition, and they

should be encouraged to provide balanced and thoughtful analyses of the complex issues surrounding poverty.

36. A better understanding is needed of the causes of poverty. Various explanations have been given, inter alia, structural and institutional factors rooted in societies; specific barriers that groups have to confront and overcome, such as lack of access to education or resources; for individuals, lack of community or family support and a host of personal problems that lead to social dependence.

37. There is also a greater need to recognize the complexity of the condition of poverty. Often, poverty is considered to be a single phenomenon with identical causes and effects everywhere, and the assumption is made that all people living in poverty have similar needs and aspirations. False assumptions can lead to simplistic, universal solutions which fail to take individual circumstances into account and which are often inappropriate, leading to failure, wasted resources and frustration.

38. Local communities must be able to help themselves as economic growth accelerates. It is essential that local networks, organizations and community groups be strengthened - with funding, with training and with increased self-confidence - to enable them to defend and support their members. Experience indicates that interventions which fail to devolve decision-making to the local community tend to be less successful.

39. Strategies to eradicate poverty must also assess which groups or institutions within society may actually benefit from the poverty of others and how, so that likely resistance to anti-poverty efforts may be taken into account.

(f) Establishing partnerships with people living in poverty

40. The eradication of poverty requires the establishment of partnership between people living in poverty and the rest of society. Partnership must be based on respect and solidarity, as well as recognition of the rights and responsibilities of both the poor and the non-poor. Partnership must also be built on a new way of thinking about the poor. Strategies to eradicate poverty must be imbued with an awareness of the skills, expertise and knowledge of people living in poverty, must acknowledge and respect diversity, must provide the information and access to services and resources that will enable the poor to raise their standards of living, and must be based on the solutions that the poor themselves develop.

41. Successful partnership rests on several bases: ensuring access to fundamental services; protecting and empowering families; investing in human resources; allowing time for trusting relationships to develop; sharing knowledge between the poor and the non-poor; training individuals and institutions working with the poor; and assessing progress, with the participation of the poor.

42. To encourage self-reliance requires a long-term effort to reach out to communities of people living in poverty. It requires efforts to encourage them

to develop their own organizations based on common needs, interests or goals and should take into account a series of different phases of enablement, including consciousness raising, mobilization, participation, organization, capacity-building and allowing local control of space and resources. Particularly in cities and other areas of steady in-migration, where traditional patterns of solidarity may have broken down, it is important to support emerging forms of solidarity, including religious, women's or youth groups.

(g) Encouraging cooperation with organizations of civil society

43. Designing policies for economic and social inclusion which promote new approaches to development and to poverty eradication requires thinking about existing institutions. Efforts to eradicate poverty should include analysis of the institutions which are charged with the implementation of strategies.

44. Governments have recognized the potential of non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society to reach people living in poverty, and they are increasingly willing to enter into partnerships to promote policies and programmes for poverty eradication, including employment creation and provision of basic social services. These partnerships should be supported and encouraged.

45. Organizations of civil society are often flexible, responsive, representative and open to wide participation; many function at grass-roots level and provide vital opportunities for two-way communication with local communities. Many also provide the best means for people living in poverty to express their needs and concerns.

2. Economic and Social Council

46. At the coordination segment of its substantive session of 1996, the Economic and Social Council considered the question of coordination of the United Nations system activities for poverty eradication. It adopted a number of agreed conclusions to improve the design and implementation of United Nations activities in support of Government efforts for poverty eradication, as follows:

(a) The organizations of the United Nations system should assist Governments in preparing assessments of the poverty situation in the country as the basis for poverty eradication strategies. The specialized agencies and related organizations of the United Nations system were invited by the Economic and Social Council to strengthen and adjust their activities, programmes and medium-term strategies, as appropriate, to take into account the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

(b) A common country assessment, suggested by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, should be extended to the United Nations system and integrated into the formulation of the country strategy note, where appropriate and in agreement with the Government.

(c) The United Nations system could assist the development and support of national capacity to gather and analyse information and to refine indicators for

poverty analysis. Assistance could take the form of formulating guidelines to develop definitions, instruments and indicators, including gender-sensitive indicators, for impact assessment and for monitoring poverty programmes in accordance with the outcomes of major recent conferences and summits. Joint efforts to collect information and to undertake research and analysis should take into account the statistical work on measuring poverty and on poverty indicators already under way in countries.

(d) The Administrative Committee on Coordination should encourage coordinated, system-wide assistance from the United Nations system to Governments as they monitor and assess the achievement of their poverty-related goals and targets. The United Nations system could assist by elaborating issues that need to be addressed by Governments undertaking monitoring and assessment.

(e) The United Nations system should also provide technical cooperation and other forms of assistance to the developing countries, in particular Africa and the least developed countries, in implementing the recommendations of the recent major conferences and summits. Appropriate technical cooperation and other forms of assistance could also be provided to the countries with economies in transition.

(f) At the field level and with the leadership and facilitation of the resident coordinator, United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and bodies should expand and improve coordination and promote joint activities to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate poverty eradication activities. To promote coordination and a better division of labour, resident coordinators should be informed of planned poverty programme activities and other relevant activities.

(g) The United Nations system could establish ad hoc thematic groups, consisting of United Nations system officials and government authorities, to debate issues of poverty eradication and to design and launch initiatives and appropriate measures to achieve established goals. Under the leadership of the Government, these thematic groups and other informal forums at the field level would enhance the dialogue between Governments and all relevant development partners, including bilateral and multilateral donors and civil society, including non-governmental organizations.

3. Inter-agency task forces on follow-up to international conferences

47. The activities of the task forces referred to in paragraph 16 above, whose terms of reference and mandate are set out in the Secretary-General's report to the Economic and Social Council (E/1996/61), may be considered to be key undertakings in laying the foundations for a long-term, integrated effort by the United Nations system in support of the goals of the Decade, as set out, in particular, in the Copenhagen Programme of Action.

48. The work of the task forces will be completed early in 1997, when they will report to the Administrative Committee on Coordination at its first session of 1997, in April. Task forces have endeavoured to translate the goals, objectives

and global recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development and other recent international conferences in the social, economic and related areas into particular and precise steps and measures that can be taken by Governments as well as by non-governmental actors. They also delineate the specific capacity-building, technical help, training and financial resource support that can be expected from the international community, in particular the different entities of the United Nations system.

49. The conclusions and recommendations of the task forces will provide a valuable input also for the preparation of coherent United Nations system support programmes to countries, in the context, as appropriate, of the country strategy note exercise. Looking further ahead, these efforts may assist in the broader coordination of all assistance and cooperation programmes, multilateral and bilateral, in support of poverty eradication.

B. Suggestions and recommendations for specific activities during the Decade

Building on the work of the inter-agency task forces on follow-up to international conferences

50. Recommendation 1: The task forces on employment and sustainable livelihoods, on basic social services for all and on the enabling environment for economic and social development expect to conclude their work early in 1997 and report their findings to the Administrative Committee on Coordination in April 1997. *The General Assembly could invite the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, taking into account, inter alia, the work and conclusions of the task forces and any recommendations by the Administrative Committee on Coordination thereon, to make widely available the policy statements prepared in their respective areas of competence, setting out programmes in support of the Decade with a view to their adoption by the respective governing bodies.*

Resource mobilization

51. Recommendation 2: The General Assembly in resolution 50/107 recommended that donor countries give greater priority to the eradication of poverty in their assistance programmes and budgets. *The General Assembly should reaffirm the importance of striving for the fulfilment of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for overall official development assistance and endorse the need to increase the share of funding for social development programmes commensurate with the scope and scale of activities required to achieve the objectives and goals set out in commitment 2, relating to the eradication of poverty, of the Copenhagen Declaration and chapter 2 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit. It should, further, reaffirm the urgency of the need to ensure an appropriate level of funding of international organizations and multinational financial institutions to enable them to support effectively the goals of poverty eradication and meeting the basic social needs of all.*

52. Recommendation 3: The mobilization of new resources has been a major concern of the United Nations system for many years, especially in the period when resources have become subject to tighter constraints. *Regarding internal resources, the General Assembly may wish to encourage national efforts to mobilize private, non-governmental voluntary, in kind, and other community resources in support of anti-poverty programmes, and to re-examine and redirect public spending, local and national, to that end. Regarding external resources, the Assembly may wish to stress the need for an invigorated search for innovative ideas for generating funds for globally agreed commitments and priorities, in particular those established at recent United Nations conferences and summits.*

Specific activities for each year of the Decade

53. Recommendation 4: The Commission for Social Development requested the Secretary-General to propose specific activities for each year of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. Pending the completion of the work of the inter-agency task forces, as well as pertinent decisions of the governing bodies of the different entities of the United Nations system, especially those most directly concerned with poverty eradication, the following is suggested for consideration:

(a) Adoption by the General Assembly of the following theme for the Decade: eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.

(b) Adoption of the logo for the Year as the logo for the Decade.

(c) Preparation of a programme of observance of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October) by each fund, programme and agency of the United Nations system, for each year during the Decade, with each United Nations entity highlighting its role in the fight to eradicate poverty from its special perspective.

(d) Adoption by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session of a common theme for the United Nations system for each year of the Decade. Each entity of the United Nations would contribute according to its mandate, awareness-raising being the main purpose. The theme for the year could be selected in line with the anniversaries of major United Nations conferences, for example, in 1997, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (fifth anniversary); in 1998, the World Conference on Human Rights (fifth anniversary); in 1999 (International Year of Older Persons) the International Conference on Population and Development and the International Year of the Family (fifth anniversary); in 2000, the World Summit for Social Development (fifth anniversary), and the fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the tenth anniversary of the World Summit for Children and the Paris Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s; in 2001, Habitat II (Fifth anniversary), the World Food Summit (Sixth anniversary) and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (end of decade); and so on, in successive years up to the last year of the first Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, 2006.